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ABSTRACT

To examine political debate formats with regard to past usage and future possibilities, an analysis was made of the format features of the 1960, 1976, and 1980 general election presidential debates. Also analyzed were the formats used in the primary debates for Democratic presidential candidates in 1976 and for the Republican presidential candidates in 1980. The impact of these formats was assessed in terms of the ability of the candidates to convey their political positions on campaign issues, refute the arguments of their opponents, and generate their own agendas. The analysis revealed that the rigidity and structure of the general election debates of 1960, 1976, and 1980 were in line with the importance of the bipartisan electoral events with which they were associated. The Democratic and Republican primary debates seemed to have had the luxury of being more flexible, experimental, and informal. Ironically, there was less potential for confrontation between candidates in the primary debates because of party commonality, although the unstructured formats offered a greater degree of confrontation through their informality and lack of rigidity. Findings suggest that the attempt to achieve equity for the participating candidates and their reluctance to experiment with formats, preferring rather to stay with established structures, have contributed to the lack of great variability among past formats, except at the local and primary levels. (Appended is a table depicting the presidential primary and general election debate formats.) (HOD)

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POLITICAL DEBATE FORMATS: A STATE-OF-THE-ART REVIEW

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to provide an examination of political debate formats in view of past formats utilized and ones which could be devised for the future. To accomplish this, an analysis was made of the format features of the 1960, 1976, and 1980 General Election presidential debates and primary debates for Democratic presidential candidates in 1976 and for Republican presidential candidates in 1980. The impact of these formats was assessed in terms of the ability of the candidates to convey their political positions on campaign issues, refute the arguments of their opponent, and generate their own agenda. Recommendations were made for future debates.

Political Debate Formats: A State-of-the-Art Review

Introduction

The presidential, gubernatorial, senatorial, and congressional debates have become an increasingly important part of American politics. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that these debates are viewed by a considerable number of people,[1] the presidential ones in particular, and have a significant impact upon voting decisions.[2] It is not surprising then that political scientists, mass media specialists, and communication researchers have endeavored to study them in great detail[3] and that those participating in them and organizing them have gone to great lengths to attend to their every detail. The latter has been particularly evidenced in the intricate negotiations which have taken place prior to each debate among the various parties concerned.

Since the debates appear to influence voters in making up their minds about candidates, much has been written about their formats, specifically concerning their ability to allow for the adequate dissemination of appropriate information to the American public and their ability to provide a fair vehicle to the candidates who are endeavoring to convey their political messages.[4] A variety of recommendations have been made in the past in regard to how the format of these debates could be improved, with no particular consensus on an "ideal" format in sight.[5]

The purpose of this paper will be to analyze some of the principle formats which have been used in past political debates, look at the recommendations by others for improved formats, examine a variety of possible options in this regard, and develop some conclusions about future formats. In order to accomplish this, past political debates will be used as a framework for analysis, primarily the presidential primary and general election debates.

The televised political debates have provided the American public an alternative source of information about candidates running for office to appearances through nightly news coverage of the campaign trail and carefully packaged media commercials. These events have allowed the public to view and/or hear opposing candidates in a single context simultaneously (providing for immediate comparison and contrast of candidates and forcing evaluation of the opposition). These debates have given the public the opportunity to actually compare candidates under pressure against one another on issue or image related information. Through these debates, the voters have had the opportunity to see candidates for an extended period of time; only through national television programs such as "Meet the Press," "Face the Nation," or "Issues and Answers," or local programs of a similar nature, has the public otherwise had the opportunity to see a candidate discuss his positions at length. Nightly news media coverage does not afford the viewer this opportunity; viewers who do not see these extended broadcasts and who simply rely on news programs for candidate information must base their political decision making on very brief abstracts of events along the campaign trail and little, if any, simultaneous comparison of candidates.

These debates have not only served as a means to inform the electorate, but have probably also elevated the quality of public dialogue. In addition, the debates have offered candidates the opportunity to sharpen the issue differences between one another in the eyes of the public and to convey their messages without the usual press conference interruptions. Other benefits of the debates have likely included a better educated public about comapign issues and increased public interest in voting participation. From the standpoint of campaign expenditures, these debates have most likely given the candidates the opportunity to speak to the largest and most attentive audience at the least

expense, no matter what the level of election involved; as the cost of campaign traveling increases, these debates will become even more important in their function, particularly at the presidential level.

A debate may be defined as "a campaign event in which two or more competing candidates in joint appearance have the opportunity to present their positions, refute their opponent's positions, and respond to attacks made by their opponent during the encounter."[6] According to Auer (1977), traditional debate contains the following five elements: (1) a confrontation; (2) in equal and adequate time; (3) of matched contestants; (4) on a stated proposition; and (5) to gain an audience decision.

A number of concerns have been raised in regard to the various major political debate telecasts since those between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon during the 1960 presidential campaign. These concerns became increasingly focused as the debates were shown to be an important factor in the development of voter perceptions of candidates and oftentimes in election outcomes.

First, debates do not serve the public well when they simply encourage candidates to "score" against one another, rather than actually debate. This tendency evidenced in past televised debates has resulted in part from the formats which have made the events appear like "boxing matches" and in part because of the way in which the media has covered them. In an attempt to interpret these events, the media has sometimes relied upon a "winner-loser" orientation.

Another potential problem emerges when the debate format encourages short answers which resound "worn commonplaces" heard frequently in the campaign.[7] Often absent from these responses are well-developed and thoughtful arguments.

The advantage, of course, to the candidate who can use packaged "commonplaces" effectively is that he can deliver his messages rapidly in polished form, using various tested appeals.

The role of the panelists provides an additional source of potential difficulty. If the panelists simply pose propositions from which the contenders can develop arguments, then a true debate occurs. The tendency in past presidential debates in particular has been for the panelists to enter somewhat of a third party role, taking up quite a bit of time in asking questions, directing some hostility toward the candidates in the content of their questioning, and choosing questions which do not invite debate. On a few occasions, these questions have seemed more a reflection of the interest of a particular panelist than general electoral issues. Panelists have frequently been guilty of asking multiple questions within the framework of a single question, making it difficult for a candidate to respond. The debates have often seemed more like press conferences than debates, with panelists asking candidates questions and candidates responding to the questions, rather than debating one another.

The panelists have served as agenda setters for some of the debates, often pressuring the candidates with hostile or one-sided questions into submissive responses, acting as though their role was to "unmask" the candidates. In addition, the line of questioning has at times taken somewhat of a transitory approach, rather than a view toward long-range perspectives.

In developing political debate formats, organizers examine a variety of considerations: speaker time, speaker rotation, the use of opening and closing statements, the use of rebuttals and follow-up questions, the restatement of questions, the use of notes by the contenders, the selection of moderator and

panelists, and the subject areas to be covered. These considerations also become vitally important to the candidates involved, since they impact upon their ability to present and defend their own positions, to point out the weaknesses of the arguments advanced by the opponent, and to generate their own agendas. The degree to which candidates can adapt to the constraints of a particular format imposed upon them will reflect upon their ability to effectively perform in the debate context.

As part of an analysis of political debate formats, it seems appropriate to examine the major debates that have taken place thus far in American political history, particularly insofar as their formats are concerned.

The 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Senatorial debates marked the beginning of American political debating as a major campaign activity. The two Senatorial candidates participated in seven debates, totalling 21 hours, over a three-month period in seven Illinois cities. The format of these debates was designed so that the first speaker presented his position in the initial hour, the other speaker then took an hour and an half to present his position, and finally the first speaker provided a rebuttal in the remaining half hour. No moderator or panelists intervened in the proceedings. Though no formal propositions were developed for these debates, the subject of slavery emerged as the central issue. The candidates alternated in opening and closing the seven debates.

Another significant event in the development of political campiagn debating was the radio debate between Thomas Dewey and Harold Stassen during the 1948 Oregon presidential primary campaign. This encounter represented the first broadcast of a political debate to the American public. Stassen was given the initial opportunity for a 20-minute opening statement in the debate, Dewey followed. Rebuttal comments of eight and one-half minutes each were then heard

by the candidates, Dewey going last. The two contenders discussed a single issue in the one-hour encounter, the question of outlawing communism.

In 1960 a major effort was made by the television networks to impose the Dewey-Stassen format upon the first televised presidential debates between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. The candidates, however, would not agree to the format, arguing that it would attract little audience interest, since no single issue prevailed in the campaign more than others.

Table 1 in the appendix of this paper provides some basic information about each of the Kennedy-Nixon debates, as well as other presidential debates which occurred subsequently: date, time, location, length, names of the candidates, moderator, panelists, subject matter, and format.

The four Kennedy-Nixon debates featured essentially the same format. All of the debates offered opportunities for candidate rebuttals; none allowed follow-up questions. The speaker time limits were identical for all four encounters: two and a half minutes for candidate responses, one and a half minutes for candidate rebuttals. Panelists in these debates were primarily broadcast journalists. The first and fourth debates were limited on subject matter, the second and third debates were not. The candidates conveyed approximately the same number of messages in each of the four encounters: (1) first debate--Kennedy, 13, and Nixon, 11; (2) second debate--Kennedy, 13, and Nixon, 13; (3) third debate--Kennedy, 13, and Nixon, 12; and (4) fourth debate--Kennedy, 10, and Nixon, 9. Opening and closing statements were only used in the first and fourth debates. Each of the debates was telecast for a one-hour period from a television studio with no audience present.

Sixteen years later the League of Women Voters undertook the task of sponsoring four Democratic primary forums. Each of these events was cast as a

regional event over a four-month period: the New England Forum, the Southern Forum, and Mid-Atlantic Forum, and the Midwest Forum.

As shown in Table 1, a specific political theme was provided to direct the dialogue at each of the four forums. Though the original concept involved the participation of all political candidates running for the Presidency, only the Democratic candidates choose to do so. In contrast to other debates discussed in this paper, these forums all featured local experts on the subject of discussion as the panelists. As many as seven Democratic candidates participated in these debates; Jimmy Carter, the eventual party nominee, participated in three of them.

The second series of General Election presidential debates offered quite a bit of contrast to those held between Kennedy and Nixon. The three debates between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford were each 90 minutes in length and were held in community locations with audiences present. Both follow-up questions and rebuttals were permitted. No opening statements were utilized in any of these debates; closing statements were employed in all of them. While the first two debates were limited on subject matter, the third was not. The panelists for these three debates were primarily print journalists. The time available for candidate responses to optional follow-up questions (2 minutes) and candidate rebuttal comments (2 minutes) was consistent among the three debates; the time available for responding to the original panelist questions varied slightly among the debates (two and a half minutes versus three minutes).

The number of messages conveyed by the candidates was approximately the same for the debates: (1) first debate--Carter, 20, and Ford, 18; (2) second debate--Carter, 18, and Ford, 19; and (3) third debate--Carter, 15, and Ford, 20. Due to the increased length of these debates over the 1960 presidential

debates, this represented many more messages than Kennedy and Nixon were afforded in their encounters.

An additional feature of the 1976 campaign and new televised debating was the vice-presidential debate between Walter Mondale and Robert Dole. The subject matter for this debate essentially represented three segments, equal to those of the three presidential encounters. Unlike the other General Election debates, this one offered opening statements from the candidates. Both contenders were given the opportunity to convey 16 messages. Closing statements were provided by both candidates. No follow-up questions were allowed; rebuttal comments were featured. Unlike all the other debates discussed in this paper, this one was 75 minutes in length.

For the 1980 presidential campaign, five Republican primary debates were telecast over a four-month period from five states. The format of these five encounters varied considerably and were in strong contrast to those evidenced in the General Election debates described earlier.

The first of these debates in Iowa offered a very structured format for the six candidates who participated. Each candidate was able to convey 14-15 messages within an 18-minute framework. Questions were not only sought from a panel of journalists, but also members of the audience. Closing statements were permitted, opening statements were not. Questions were rotated to the candidates to provide an equal opportunity to speak on a topic; rebuttal comments in the true sense were not provided for, although a candidate could choose to infuse such comments within a response to a question.

The format for the 120-minute debate provided for a relatively formal presentation. Because of the inflexible structure of the debate and the routine questioning offered, much in the sense of a press conference, it became

difficult to distinguish among the six candidates, who were not only trying to stand apart from one another, but also aiming to solidify their party.

The second of these debates in New Hampshire featured all seven of the Republican candidates. The ninety-minute debate offered a similar format to the one presented in Iowa. Each candidate had the opportunity to convey nine messages within a framework of ten and a half minutes. Candidates had considerably less time to convey their positions in this debate than the previous one; this was obviously due to the addition of another candidate and reduced broadcast time.

Once again, it was difficult in the New Hampshire debate to distinguish among the contenders. However, the number of questions raised in the debate did allow for a variety of topics to be discussed.

A third primary debate was held in South Carolina among four Republican candidates. The appearance of the debate was somewhat informal, in contrast to the more formal staging of other debates; the intent seemed to be to make the event seem conversational, rather than adversarial.

In contrast to the two previous debates, the South Carolina one featured follow-up questions, but no questions from the audience. The total available speaking time for each candidate was 18 minutes; the four contenders were each afforded the opportunity to convey 15 messages. Closing statements were a feature of the debate, opening statements were not.

The questions posed in the South Carolina debate had slightly more intimidating and personalized overtones than those in the Iowa debate; the follow-up questions and some of the panelist questions were directed generally at concerns associated with the single candidate to which they were directed.

Because there were only four contenders in the debate, fewer than in the previous two debates, it was easier to distinguish among them. The format, however, was rather structured so that it was difficult for the candidates to really debate one another; they were forced into simply attempting to answer the specific questions posed by the panelists and moderator. Generally speaking, the challenges given to candidates were provided by those asking the questions, not the other contenders.

The fourth of the primary debates in Illinois featured four Republican candidates. No panelists were employed in this debate, in contrast to the previous three primary debates.

The Illinois debate was designed for informal discussion. With the exception of the candidate closing statements, speaking time limits were nonexistent; for the majority of the debate speaking rotation was flexible. The moderator injected questions occasionally; his role, in general, was minimal; subjects were almost always initiated by the moderator. Candidates were permitted to ask one another questions, although cross-examination in the true sense was not permitted. Individual candidate messages varied rather considerably in length, even in terms of a single question. In one portion of the ninety-minute debate a unique feature was introduced into the debate, that of requesting one-sentence position statements from the candidates on a variety of subjects.

The final debate in the series was held in Texas between the remaining two contenders at that time, Ronald Reagan and George Bush. The format for the sixty-minute debate provided for relatively open discussion and freedom of direction. The moderator, as was the case in the Illinois debate, played, on the whole, a minimal role in the interaction between the two contenders; no panel of questioners was present. Subjects were generally initiated by the

moderator, although candidates were free to address questions to one another; the format, however, did not allow for a true cross-examination process between the candidates.

There were no time limitations imposed upon the candidates except in their closing statements. As with the case with three other of these primary debates, the Texas one utilized some questions from members of the audience.

Because of the lack of a restricting structure, the two candidates had ample time to convey their positions, refute arguments presented by the opponent, and clarify misconceptions about themselves. However, because the contenders held basically similar positions on issues, the debate became only minimally confrontational.

Two General Election debates were held in 1980. The first between Ronald Reagan and John Anderson provided for the first opportunity for an Independent to participate in a nationally televised debate; the Democratic contender, however, was not present, limiting the full extent of the dialogue.

The format for this debate was highly structured along the lines of the previous General Election encounters between Kennedy and Nixon and Carter and Ford. The panelists consisted totally of print journalists. The ninety-minute debate featured only six main questions, minimizing the number of issues to be discussed; no follow-up questions were permitted. Rebuttal comments were allowed in the debate, one round in one segment, two rounds in another segment.

Each candidate was afforded the opportunity of conveying 13 messages in the debate for a total of 27 available minutes. The maximum number of messages per topic allowed for both candidates together was four. No opening statements were employed in the encounter; closing statements were given by each contender.

Because the questioning in the debate was confined to a very restrictive format, panelists tended to formulate multiple questions within the single question framework. In addition, some of the questions were rather one-sided and limiting.

The single 1980 debate between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan featured a similarly restrictive format, though more questions were asked and more time was available. A total of eight questions were posed to the candidates. The ninety-minute debate featured a complex question and answer format, allowing for follow-up questions and rebuttal statements. The same questions were rotated from one candidate to the other, then were restated, as they were in the Reagan-Anderson debate. Opening statements were not utilized in this debate; closing statements were employed. As was the case in the Reagan-Anderson debate, as many as two rebuttals per candidate were allowed in one portion of the debate. Panelists, once again, consisted primarily of print journalists.

Each candidate was afforded the opportunity to convey 25 messages during the debate, considerably more than in the Reagan-Anderson debate. A total speaking time of 37 minutes was made available to each of the two contenders.

In this debate, as in the previous one, the panelists were unable to resist the temptation to formulate multiple questions with the framework of single questions. The format of the Carter-Reagan debate created an extremely formal atmosphere, similar to that found in the Reagan-Anderson debate. Both of these debates were staged in the tradition of the presidential debates of 1960 and 1976.

Upon examination of the 19 televised presidential debates held thus far, the range of formats becomes clear. The rigidity and structure of the General Election debates of 1960, 1976, and 1980 seem in line with the importance of the

bi-partisan electoral events with which they were associated. The Democratic and Republican primary debates would seem to have had the luxury of being more flexible, experimental, and informal. Ironically, the potential for confrontation between candidates stands to be of a lesser nature in the primary debates because of party commonality than in the bi-partisan encounters, although the unstructured formats, as evidenced in at least the nine primary debates described, could offer greater confrontation discussion through their informality and lack of rigidity.

Many problems inherent in media debates and their coverage make it difficult to overcome the sources of the criticisms attached to current political debating forms. Adapting a traditional model of debate to the confines of modern technology is problematic at best. The public, being accustomed to slick, brief presentations through television high in entertainment value, is resistant to lengthy discourse such as could be identified with the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

Looking back at the prerequisite conditions of debate as described by Auer earlier, it is difficult to see that the campaign debate telecasts thus far have measured up to these conditions, so that even designating these events as "debates" is questionable. Stated propositions, for example, have been largely absent from these events; there has been little confrontation evidenced in these encounters. In this vein these events have often been referred to as "joint television appearances" rather than debates.

Because of the restrictive formats imposed upon many of the debates, instant reactions have been reflected in the candidate oratory, rather than carefully developed arguments. Time restrictions for candidate response have been a key element in this problem. The trade-off, of course, in restricting the length of discourse is coverage of an adequate number of topics.

The choice of questions for a political debate is a subject of considerable discussion. Among the concerns are covering national versus regional issues and subjects most current in the campaign versus those of more general scope. The problem of multiple questioning within the framework of single questions has been brought up in the context of the General Election debates. The candidates additionally face the dilemma of answering questions posed by panelists and truly debating one another. While rebuttal opportunities are a positive feature for debates from the standpoint of the candidates, a problem arises for the initiator of the original response in leaving himself wide open for criticism; the candidate ends up weighting the benefits of responding to a panelist question versus opening up new ground to which his opponent will ultimately respond. Inclusion of rebuttals does increase the clash potential of a debate.

An adversial relationship has seemed to develop in some of these debates between the panelists and the candidates as reflected in somewhat of a hostile tone in the line of questioning. In some instances the questions have appeared to be a stab at journalistic value in creating a story for the press than for objective inquiry of the candidates. The "winner-loser" orientation ascribed by the media in covering these events has exacerbated the tendency to aim these events toward "unmasking" the contenders. This "winner-loser" orientation is further reinforced, of course, by the candidates who participate in the debate to win the election (and defeat the opponent), not to educate the public about political processes.

Political candidates are inherently comfortable with a press conference format; it is a context they are familiar with in everyday campaigning. In general, this is the format that has been utilized in the major political debates thus far, particularly those at the presidential level. Employing any

other type of format becomes risky to them. Therefore, changes in present formats is difficult. Instead, the press conference format, in one guise or another, is utilized. Cross-examination by candidates (Oregon-style debating) is a more rare form evidenced in debates. It has been successfully employed at the local level (e. g., the three senatorial debates in 1982 between Jerry Brown and Pete Wilson), but not at the General Election presidential level. Informal discussion with commentators, another appealing option, has some precedent at the presidential primary level (e. g., the 1968 California debate between Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy).

Considerable discussion has been made in critiques of political debates about the selection of the panelists. The Kennedy-Nixon debates featured primarily broadcast journalists. Since then there has been an increasing use of print journalists in major debates. The core of discussion around this concern has centered on panelist objectivity. In the 1976 primary forums, local experts were utilized as panelists to support the individual topical themes around which each of these events was directed. This option has recognized problems insofar as the tendencey of these panelsists to advance "pet" theories and to radiate stage fright in their presentation, since in all likelihood they would not be accustomed to camera appearances. In addition, experts may become overly technical in their questioning to the candidates, making it difficult for voters to comprehend the ensuing dialogue.

Some debates have eliminated the use of a panel. For two of the 1980 Republican primary debates, for example, the proceedings were conducted by only a moderator. A panel may provide control and direction to a political debate. There is a fine line, however, between panelist intervention and facilitation of the candidate dialogue.

The use of audience questions has been another area for discussion among critics. These questions may take valuable time away from other dialogue. On the other hand, the questions reflect voter involvement in the process and create public presence during the event.

Focusing debates on particular limited topic areas has been tested in some debates (e. g., the 1976 Democratic primary forums). Obviously, such restrictions have a direct bearing on the conveyence of issue related information by candidates. For a campaign keyed to a small number of issues on which the candidates differ, this option seems logical. In the event that the candidates basically agree on issues (such as in a primary campaign), it would seem reasonable to focus a debate on candidate character and abilities.

In making recommendations for future political debates, several considerations emerge. These events need to be designed in such a way as to minimize the involvement of panelists beyond what is necessary to pose propositions through their questions. Panelists need to be discouraged from using intimidating or multiple-faceted questions, as these cannot be translated into clear and fairly stated propositions. The "shot-gun" presentation of questions used in press conferences does not seem preferable in debates. The debate questions should be simple, short, and direct. Ideally, each question ought to clearly imply a debatable proposition.

Multiple questions have been primarily prevalent in the General Election debates; at the same time, the formats for these debates has allowed for fewer opportunities to pose a question than in the primary debates reviewed. Obviously, a type of trade-off has occurred here: frequent questions created shorter response times and encouraged a press conference format; less frequent questions encouraged the panelists to hide several questions within the guise of

a single question and then made it very difficult for the candidates to present responsive answers within a set time frame. Regrettably, questions in most of the debates analyzed here were often tailored to the initial respondent. This led to one-sided questioning which discouraged a genuine debate among the candidates. Obviously, this practice needs to be avoided in future debate formats.

Future debates need to be designed so as to minimize the stiff quality of past debates. Such a change might lessen the tendency of the press and the public at large to view them as contests between candidates to see who is the most facile.

There appears to be somewhat of a trade-off between informal and formal debate formats. The informal format can provide the least opportunity for a candidate to "hide" within the structure of a debate so as to evade or ignore open discussion of a complex issue. The informal format, however, legislates the least control of the interaction in terms of speaking time and speaking rotation is not strictly imposed. A candidate engaged in informal debate has no guarantee that he will have an equal opportunity with his opponent(s) to convey his positions or express counterarguments. A formal structure offers a candidate at least assurance of equal speaking opportunities with his opponent(s). The informal option would probably not be a likely choice in the bi-partisan encounter, since so much is at stake for the candidates. To promote more open issue oriented discussion, the formal structure must allow for sufficient rebuttal time and minimal interference by panelists asking the questions.

Closing statements appear to be an effective device for summarizing what has transpired. Opening statements offer another opportunity for setting the tone of the debate. Opening statements were only employed in two of the four

Kennedy-Nixon debates in 1960 and in the 1976 Vice Presidential debate between Walter Mondale and Robert Dole of the debates reviewed here, as shown in Table 2 in the appendix of this paper. Certainly, the restatement of questions was a positive innovation in the 1980 Carter-Reagan debate, as it refocused attention on the query, helped avoid ambiguity, and fostered a debate on the proposition implicit in the question. Multiple opportunities for rebuttals (provided for in the Carter-Reagan debate, for example) are preferrable if a structured format is to be imposed.

Finally, allowing the moderator to introduce various propositions formulated in advance during the debate itself has been suggested by several scholars as a way to improve the debate formats.[8] In this way, the contenders might debate more with one another, with the propositions being the vehicle for initiating interaction, rather than questions, and with the moderator monitoring the interaction, rather than a panel of journalists, who have had a tendency to play too large a role in the process of debating, particularly at the national level.

The variety of campaign debates reviewed here and elsewhere provides a wide range of formats from which to choose or modify in the future. The primary debates have provided models for incorporating as many as seven candidates into a workable format. Any format can be misused or abused--whether by the candidates, the moderator, or the panelists. The goal is not to find a "perfect" format for political campaign debates, but rather to develop appropriate and productive formats for different campaign situations.

The attempt to achieve equity for the participating candidates and their reluctance to experiment with formats, preferring rather to stay with established structures, have contributed to the lack of great variability among past

formats, except at the local and primary levels. These factors will continue to stiffle such experimentation unless an incentive is created to do so. In addition, until debates can be viewed with less of an emphasis upon their perceived entertainment value, less effort will be expended in this direction by debate organizers.

Footnotes

[1]See, for example, Stanton, 1961, p. 26; Robinson, 1979.

[2]See, for example, Chaffee, 1978.

[3]See, for example, Kraus, The Great Debates (Kennedy vs. Nixon); Kraus, The Great Debates (Carter vs. Ford); Bitzer and Rueter, 1980.

[4]See, for example, Karayn, 1979 (b), Bitzer and Rueter, 1980, pp. 193-250; Kraus, 1964; Germond and Witcover, 1979; Sendler, 1980; Kraus and Davis, 1981 (b); Martel, 1977; Mitchell, 1979.

[5]See, for example, Bitzer and Rueter, 1980, p. 225.

[6]Martel, 1977, p. 9.

[7]The term "worn commonplaces" is adopted here for discussion from Bitzer and Rueter, 1980, pp. 132-135.

[8]Germond and Witcover, 1979; Kraus, 1964.

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TABLE 2

Comparison of Presidential Debates

Opening Statements:	Kennedy-Nixon--1st debate (1960) Kennedy-Nixon--4th debate (1960) Mondale-Dole (1976)
Closing Statements:	Kennedy-Nixon--1st debate (1960) Kennedy-Nixon--4th debate (1960) Carter-Ford--all 3 debates (1976) Mondale-Dole (1976) All 5 primary Republican debates (1980) Reagan-Anderson (1980) Carter-Reagan (1980)
Rebuttals:	All 10 General Election debates (1960/1976/1980)
Follow-Up Questions:	Carter-Ford--all 3 debates (1976) South Carolina primary debate (1980) Carter-Reagan (1980)
Subject Matter Limited:	Kennedy-Nixon--1st debate (1960) Kennedy-Nixon--4th debate (1960) All 4 primary Democratic debates (1976) Carter-Ford--1st debate (1976) Carter-Ford--2nd debate (1976) Mondale-Dole (1976) Carter-Reagan (1980)
Unlimited Subject Matter:	Kennedy-Nixon--2nd debate (1960) Kennedy-Nixon--3rd debate (1960) Carter-Ford--3rd debate (1960) All 5 primary Republican debates (1980) Reagan-Anderson (1980)
Interrogation by Audience Members:	All 4 primary Democratic debates (1976) Iowa primary debate (1980) New Hampshire primary debate (1980) Illinois primary debate (1980) Texas primary debate (1980)
Formal Cross-Examination by Candidates:	None

Table 2
Page Two

Length:

(a) 60 minutes
Kennedy-Nixon--all 4 debates (1960)
Illinois primary debate (1976)
Texas primary debate (1980)
Reagan-Anderson (1980)

(b) 75 minutes
Mondale-Dole (1976)

(c) 90 minutes
Florida primary debate (1976)
New York primary debate (1976)
Carter-Ford--all 3 debates (1976)
New Hampshire primary debate (1980)
South Carolina primary debate (1980)
Illinois primary debate (1980)
Carter-Reagan (1980)

(d) 120 minutes
Massachusetts primary debate (1976)
Iowa primary debate (1980)

Number of Candidates: All 10 General Election debates (1960/1976/1980)--2
Massachusetts primary debate (1976)--7
Florida primary debate (1976)--3
New York primary debate (1976)--5
Illinois primary debate (1976)--2
Iowa primary debate (1980)--6
New Hampshire primary debate (1980)--7
South Carolina primary debate (1980)--4
Illinois primary debate (1980)--4
Texas primary debate (1980)--2

Moderator: (a) broadcast journalist
Kennedy-Nixon--all 4 debates (1960)
Carter-Ford--all 3 debates (1976)
New Hampshire primary debate (1980)
South Carolina primary debate (1980)
Illinois primary debate (1980)
Texas primary debate (1980)
Reagan-Anderson (1980)
Carter-Reagan (1980)

(b) print journalist
Mondale-Dole (1976)
Iowa primary debate (1980)

TABLE 1

Presidential Primary and General Election Debate Formats: 1960, 1976, 1980

1960: General Election Televised Debates

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
1	September 26, 1960 9:30-10:30 P.M., EDST WBBM-TV, Chicago, Illinois 60 Minutes	John Kennedy Richard Nixon	Howard K. Smith, CBS	Robert Fleming, ABC Stuart Novins, CBS Sander Vanocur, NBC Charles Warren, MBS	Domestic Issues	Opening Statements: 8 Minutes Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate Answers: 2 1/2 Minutes Rebuttal Comments: 1 1/2 Minutes Closing Statements: 3 Minutes
2	October 7, 1960 7:30-8:30 P.M., EDST Studio A, WRC-TV, Washington, D. C. 60 Minutes	John Kennedy Richard Nixon	Frank McGee, NBC	Edward P. Morgan, ABC Paul Nivin, CBS Alvin Spivak, UPI Hal Levy, Newsday	Unlimited	No Opening Statements Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate Answers: 2 1/2 Minutes Rebuttal Comments: 1 1/2 Minutes No Closing Statements
3	October 13, 1960 7:30-8:30 P.M., EDST Studio A & Studio B, ABC-TV, Los Angeles (Nixon and panel); TV #1, ABC-TV, New York (Kennedy) Split-screen telecast 60 Minutes	John Kennedy Richard Nixon	William Shadel, ABC	Roscoe Drummond, New York Herald Tribune Frank McGee, NBC Charles Von Fremd, CBS Douglas Cater, The Reporter	Unlimited	No Opening Statements Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate Answers: 2 1/2 Minutes Rebuttal Comments: 1 1/2 Minutes No Closing Statements
4	October 21, 1960 10:00-11:00 P.M., EDST TV #1, ABC-TV, New York 60 Minutes	John Kennedy Richard Nixon	Quincy Howe, ABC	John Edwards, ABC Walter Cronkite, CBS Frank Singiser, MBS John Chancellor, NBC	Foreign Policy	Opening Statements: 8 Minutes Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate Answers: 2 1/2 Minutes Rebuttal Comments: 1 1/2 Minutes Closing Statements: 4 1/2 Minutes

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Table 1
Continued

1976: Primary Election Televised Debates (Democratic Party)

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
1 "New England Forum"	February 23, 1976 8:30-10:30 P.M., EST John Hancock Hall Boston, Massachusetts 120 Minutes	Birch Bayh Henry Jackson Jimmy Carter Milton Shapp Morris Udall Fred Harris Sargent Shriver	Elie Abel	Carolyn Shaw Bell Robert Hall Karen Horn	"High Employment, Low Inflation, and Cheap Energy: Can We Have Them All?"	No Opening Statements Questions to Candidates from Audience, Moderator, and Panelists on Random Basis No Closing Statements
2 "Southern Forum"	March 1, 1976 Sheraton Four Ambassador Hotel Miami, Florida	Henry Jackson Jimmy Carter Milton Shapp	Elie Abel	John L. Mills Winifred Bell Kenneth W. Clarkson	"From Social Security to Welfare: What is the National Responsibility?"	No Opening Statements Questions to Candidates from Audience, Moderator, and Panelists on Random Basis Candidate Answers: No More Than 1 1/2 Minutes
3 "Mid-Atlantic Forum"	March 29, 1976 8:30-10:00 P.M., EST Waldorf Astoria Grand Ballroom New York City, New York	Jimmy Carter Henry Jackson Frank Church Morris Udall Fred Harris	Elie Abel	Frank N. Blatz, Jr. Neal Peirce Lucille Rose	"Who is Responsible for the Cities?"	No Closing Statements
4 "Mid-west Forum"	May 3, 1976 8:30-9:30 P.M., EST Guildhall, Ambassador West Hotel Chicago, Illinois 60 Minutes	Morris Udall Frank Church	Elie Abel	Dick Kosobund David Mellon Phil Odeen	"Defense, Detente, and Trade: What Are Our Goals?"	No Opening Statements Questions to Candidates from Audience, Moderator, and Panelists on a Random Basis No Closing Statements

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Table 1
Continued

1976: General Election Televised Debates

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
1	September 23, 1976 9:30-11:00 P.M., EDT Walnut Street Theater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 90 Minutes	Jimmy Carter Gerald Ford	Edwin Newman, NBC	Frank Reynolds, ABC James Gannon, Wall Street Journal Elizabeth Drew, New Yorker	Domestic Issues and Economic Policy	No Opening Statements Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate Answers: 3 Minutes Answers to Optional Follow-Up Questions: 2 Minutes Rebuttal Comments: 2 Minutes Closing Statements: 3 Minutes
2	October 6, 1976 9:30-11:00 P.M., EDT Palace of Fine Arts Theater San Francisco, California 90 Minutes	Jimmy Carter Gerald Ford	Pauline Frederick, NPR	Max Frankel, New York Times Henry L. Trewhitt, Baltimore Sun Richard Valeriani, NBC	Foreign and Defense Issues	No Opening Statements Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate Answers: 3 Minutes Answers to Optional Follow-Up Questions: 2 Minutes Rebuttal Comments: 2 Minutes Closing Statements: 3 Minutes
3	October 15, 1976 9:30-10:45 P.M., EDT Alley Theatre Houston, Texas 75 Minutes	Walter Mondale Robert Dole	James Roge, Chicago Sun-Times	Hal Bruno, Newsweek Magazine Marilyn Berger, NBC Walter Mears, Associated Press	Domestic (1/3) and Foreign (1/3) Issues; Unlimited (1/3)	Opening Statements: 2 Minutes Alternative Questions to Candidates Candidate "A" Answer: 2 1/2 Minutes Candidate "B" Answer: 2 1/2 Minutes Candidate "A" Rebuttal Comments: 1 Minute Closing Statements: 3 Minutes

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Table 1
Continued

1976: General Election Televised Debates

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
4	October 22, 1976 9:30-11:00 P.M., EDT Phi Beta Kappa Hall, College of William and Mary Williamsburg, Virginia 90 Minutes	Jimmy Carter Gerald Ford	Barbara Walters, ABC	Joseph Kraft, Syndicated Columnist Robert Maynard, Washington Post Jack Nelson, Los Angeles Times	Unlimited	No Opening Statements Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate Answers: 2 1/2 Minutes Answers to Optional Follow-Up Questions: 2 Minutes Rebuttal Comments: 2 Minutes Closing Statements: 4 Minutes

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Table 1
Continued

1980: Primary Election Televised Debates (Republican Party)

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
1	January 5, 1980 8:30-10:30 P.M., EST Des Moines Civic Center Des Moines, Iowa 120 Minutes	Philip Crane Howard Baker John Anderson John Connelly Robert Dole George Bush	James Gannon, Des Moines Register and Tribune	Richard Doak, Des Moines Tribune Mary Gorgy Washington Star George Anthan, Des Moines Register and Tribune Walter Mears, Associated Press	Unlimited	No Opening Statements 1st Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates from Panel Candidate "A" Answer: 2 Minutes Candidate "B"-"F" Answer: 1 Minute 2nd Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates from Audience Candidate "A" Answer: 1 Minute Candidate "B"-"F" Answer: 1 Minute 3rd Segment: Alternating Questions to Single Candidate from Audience Candidate Answer: 1 Minute Closing Statements: 3 Minutes

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Table 1
Continued

1980: Primary Election Televised Debates (Republican Party)

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
4	March 15, 1980 Continental Plaza Hotel Chicago, Illinois 90 Minutes	Ronald Reagan John Anderson George Bush Philip Crane	Howard K. Smith, ABC	None	Unlimited	No Opening Statements 1st Segment: Random Questions to Candidates from Moderator Candidate Answer: No Limit 2nd Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates from Moderator Candidate Answer: One-Sentence Position Statement 3rd Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidate from Audience Candidate Answer: No Limit Closing Statements: 1 Minute
5	April 23, 1980 Albert Thomas Convention Center Houston, Texas 60 Minutes	Ronald Reagan George Bush	Howard K. Smith, ABC	None	Unlimited	No Opening Statements 1st Segment: Subjects Generated by Moderator; No Time Limits (Bulk of Debate) 2nd Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates from Audience Candidate Answer: No Limit Closing Statements: 1 Minute

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Table 1
Continued

1980: General Election Televised Debates

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
1	September 21, 1980 10:00-11:00 P.M., EDT Baltimore Convention Center Baltimore, Maryland 60 Minutes	Ronald Reagan John Anderson	Bill Moyers, PBS	Carol Loomis, Fortune Magazine Daniel Greenberg, Syndicated Columnist Bill Corddry, Baltimore Sun Lee May, Los Angeles Times Jayne Bryant Quinn, Newsweek Magazine Selma Golden, New York Times	Unlimited	No Opening Statements Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate "A" Answer: 2 1/2 Minutes Restatement of Question Candidate "B" Answer: Rebuttal Comments Candidate "A": 1 1/4 Minutes Candidate "B": 1 1/4 Minutes Closing Statements: 3 Minutes

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Table 1
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1980: General Election Televised Debates

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
2	October 28, 1980 9:30-11:00 P.M., EDT Public Music Hall Cleveland Convention Center Cleveland, Ohio 90 Minutes	Jimmy Carter Ronald Reagan	Howard K. Smith, ABC	Marvin Stone, U. S. News and World Report Harry Ellis, Christian Science Monitor William Hilliard, Portland Oregonian Barbara Walters, ABC	Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues	No Opening Statements 1st Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate "A" Answer: 2 Minutes Follow-Up Question Candidate "A" Answer: 1 Minute Same Procedure for Candidate "B" Candidate "A" Rebuttal Comment: 1 Minute Candidate "B" Rebuttal Comment: 1 Minute 2nd Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates Candidate "A" Answer: 2 Minutes Candidate "B" Answer: 2 Minutes Candidate "A" Rebuttal Comment: 1 Minute Candidate "B" Rebuttal Comment: 1 Minute Candidate "A" Rebuttal Comment: 1 Minute Candidate "B" Rubattal Comment: 1 Minute Closing Statements: 3 Minutes

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Table 1
Continued

1980: Primary Election Televised Debates (Republican Party)

Number	Date/Time/Location/Length	Candidates	Moderator	Panelists	Subject Matter	Format
2	February 20, 1980 Manchester Central High School Manchester, New Hampshire 90 Minutes	John Anderson John Connally Philip Crane George Bush Howard Baker Robert Dole Ronald Reagan	Howard K. Smith, ABC	Howard K. Smith, ABC Eileen Shanahan, Washington Star Joseph Kraft, Syndicated Columnist	Unlimited	No Opening Statements 1st Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates from Panel Candidate "A" Answer: 2 Minutes Candidate "B"-"G" Answer: 1 Minute 2nd Segment: Alternating Questions to Single Candidate from Audience Candidate Answer: 1 1/2 Minutes Closing Statements: 1 Minute
3	February 28, 1980 Longstreet Theater, University of South Carolina Columbia, South Carolina 90 Minutes	Ronald Reagan Howard Baker John Connally George Bush	Jim Lehrer, PBS	Jack Germond, Washington Star Lee Bandy, The State and The Columbian Record William Raspberry, Washington Post Kurt Krell, The Columbian Record	Unlimited	No Opening Statements 1st Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates from Panel Candidate "A" Answer: 2 Minutes Candidate "B"-"D" Answer: 1 Minute 2nd Segment: Alternating Questions to Candidates from Panel Candidate Answer: 1 Minute 3rd Segment: Alternating Follow-Up Questions to Candidates from Moderator Candidate Answer: 1 Minute Closing Statements: 2 Minutes

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